



President Walton's April 2020 Message

New Beginnings

As I sit to write, my mind is drawn to the Disney musical, “Aladdin,” and the song entitled, “It’s a whole new world!” The world around us has rapidly changed all do to a miniscule virus germ that has invaded our world. The President of the United States has called it “an invisible enemy.” This is probably an accurate description. You cannot easily see the virus nor do most people realize when they are infected. At a time when we most need the security we find in the fellowship of believers we are encouraged to practice social distancing. That is a new term to me, and probably many of you as well. In the absence of our face-to-face encounters, social media has all of a sudden made new sense to me! What an amazing way God has taken hold of something that has been so distracting in our world and used it for His own good purposes. Granted, many pastors are going through a steep learning curve, learning how to live-stream worship services and record their sermons, some in an empty sanctuary. The laity also have to learn how to access online services with an overloaded internet system and how to focus and avoid distractions in their homes during worship. It may well be a part of how the Church will look and operate in the future.



As I have been sharing with people I have been hearing from, perhaps God is encouraging us to realize that it’s not about going to church, but more about being His Church in the world. As much as our culture has tied the church to a worship service on Sunday morning in a particular location, the Church is really God’s people, called together to shine the light of Jesus. And even though we may not be able to gather physically in a church building for Easter Sunday services, it does not in any way diminish the fact that Jesus rose from the grave and gives us new life! Whether I am with fellow believers on Easter morn or quietly tucked away in my home, I will still shout out the greeting, even if I have to answer it myself, “Jesus is Risen! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!”

Perhaps you have noticed the ironic similarity of our current national pandemic to the Lenten story. No, they are not an exact parallel, but in the midst of the darkness and despair of Satan’s despotic attempt to destroy God’s plan and claim a victory, we find that God always had it under control. At no time, even when things seemed most desperate, did God not have His plan in place. As Jesus was beaten and nailed to the Cross, when things looked like they couldn’t get worse, Jesus died. Yet we know that His death brought about a victory that destroyed the real invisible enemy. Jesus rose victoriously over sin and death. He defeated the devil then and assures us now that He will never leave us nor forsake us—ever!

Sure, it may seem that this virus has the upper hand, but remember, Good Friday is always followed by Easter Sunday—and that is no April Fool’s joke! We can be confident, even in

the midst of this pandemic, the Resurrection of Jesus is real, as is the new life He has given us. So, Easter may be a bit different this year, but the truth we proclaim remains as normal as ever! Jesus is in the business of defeating “invisible enemies” eternally! Count on it!

It is always interesting to see how people respond to crisis. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 14, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” I have heard from many pastors doing online services who are experiencing larger than normal attendance as they offer worship virtually. Could it be when something is taken away it becomes more valuable? Some have reported huge numbers of people who “logged” on to watch and listen, and while we may not know how many stayed for the whole time, what we can surmise from this is that there is a national hunger to know what God is up to in these days. While this circumstance may have highlighted this fact, it has been growing for decades. Statisticians tell us that people love Jesus, they just do not like the church—the institutional church. People, many living in fear, are looking for something more. This is an ideal time for the Church, God’s redeemed people, to reach many in 2020 for Jesus. There is a deep desire to find something more that feeds the soul, and how we, as Church, react and respond may help determine if people are searching as a passing reaction to a desperate situation or an opportunity to connect to Jesus, our Risen Lord! While the devil has made this virus a death threat, Jesus turns it into “La corona de la vida” (The Crown of Life) Rev. 2:10!



As Easter marked a new beginning, so this can really be a new beginning for the Church. Certainly many of the concerns that existed before the crisis will still exist afterward. Maybe, though, the difference will be in how we approach them. When something threatens our life, the things that seemed larger than life gain perspective. The invisible enemy has already been defeated! We celebrate a Risen Savior! It’s a time for new beginnings! Amen?

In His peace,

Greg

The President’s Equip Conference for all church workers AND laity, offering practical, strategic resources for congregations to learn and grow, will be held September 24-26, 2020 at the Hilton Buena Vista Palace in Orlando (across from Disney Springs). The theme is “One Body, Many Parts,” from 1 Corinthians 12, and we desire to bring together the whole family of God in the Florida-Georgia District. In addition to useful workshops, we will have [David Kinnaman](#), CEO of the Barna Research Group, [Donna Snow](#), and for entertainment, [The Skit Guys](#). More information will be available soon.

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